



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Chris Abele

MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DATE: June 1, 2017

TO: The Honorable Milwaukee Board of Supervisors

FROM: Chris Abele, Milwaukee County Executive

RE: Veto of County Board File No. 17-452 which illegally attempts to control the salaries of various employees

I am vetoing County Board File No. 17-452. Unfortunately, the County Board has chosen to – instead of trying to work out a compromise – take drastic and illegal action that would result in cuts to salaries of many employees and put the County at legal and operational risk.

The Board’s ordinance (section 8) states that certain reclassification “must be processed as a reallocation.” This is not allowed under the court’s ruling when the court specifically states “when the Board refuses to accept employee reclassifications... Such meddling and second-guessing is impermissible.”

Furthermore, the Board’s action is targeting specific County employees, most of whom are front-line public servants. As an example, the Board heard the story of a public safety employee who works with victim witnesses in the District Attorney’s office who would have her salary cut by 23 percent because of their illegal action. They chose to ignore this testimony and opt for petty political games, sending a message to employees that their contributions don't matter.

Last month, Judge DiMotto ruled on a lawsuit filed by County Board Chairman Theo Lipscomb that the County Board exceeded its legal authority in trying to interfere on certain administrative functions, and specifically stated that the Board’s “meddling and second-guessing” on such administrative decisions is “impermissible.”

The Chairman’s lawsuit -- the second one he filed after his initial filing was dismissed when the Court ruled decisively that Chairman Lipscomb did not have the authority to unilaterally file a lawsuit against the county executive on behalf of the County -- has already cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Board also took further action to authorize an additional \$50,000 in taxpayer-funded legal services for the Chairman’s lawsuit.

Despite concerns about this needless lawsuit, I was willing to accept the Court’s decision that the Board has the authority to create pay ranges but the executive sets salaries for individual employees within one of the approved ranges. I have always believed that we have much more on which we agree than disagree, and would prefer to devote time, energy, and taxpayer resources to solving problems, not creating them.

However, this illegal action by the Board directly conflicts with the Court’s decision and would cause imminent harm to County employees. It is my duty as the chief executive officer who is charged with management of the County and its employees to protect them from such harm.

My top concern is that the County has a fair compensation system that allows the County to attract and retain top talent. Our workforce and County residents deserve no less.

It's disappointing that Chairman Lipscomb won't abide by the Court ruling he sought and instead is forcing the County to spend additional taxpayer money on this lawsuit.

To be clear, the Board's illegal action will not only harm individual County employees who have been targeted for pay cuts, it threatens the County's ability to provide needed services in the community. I fear that the Board's attack on County workers may result in public employees feeling so threatened and intimidated that we will see a mass exodus of talent. This kind of "divide and conquer" attack on public workers demeans public service and stands in the way of our continued progress in Milwaukee County. Our employees -- from the kids working their first part-time jobs in the Parks this summer all the way up to our department heads -- do incredibly important and challenging work that matters. I am proud of all of them and their contributions to Milwaukee County. They all deserve the certainty of knowing that their pay won't be slashed on a whim. I ask you to sustain this veto.